

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

A Trist-ett, A Task-ett

- Standard: II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Grade Level: 9–12 (*Note:* Technology and creative writing)
- Objectives: The student will:
- Make a decision about the actions of Nicholas Trist
 - Review the battles and heroes of the Mexican war with a timeline
 - Create a resumé for Nicholas Trist
 - Analyze the decision made by President Polk to remove Trist
 - Choose from a series of activities on creative writing
- Time: 3 class periods
- Materials: Document: **1842** *Texians to Arms!*
1848 *The Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo*
- Exercises: *Resume of Nicholas Trist*
President Polk's Directives
- Flip Chart
Access to a computer lab or lap tops for classroom use
Websites:
- http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/t/Trist,Nicholas_Philip.html
 - <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/thankless-task-nicholas-trist?page=2.htm>
 - <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/mexican-war/nicholas-trist.htm>
- Procedures:

Setting the Stage

Nicholas Trist had many jobs in his governmental career. His private and political life would make a good movie. Trist was married to Thomas Jefferson's granddaughter and was present when Jefferson died. He also had many contacts with other prominent American statesmen.

President Polk sent Trist on a secret mission with a secret letter to complete a specific task. According to the President and his associates, Trist violated his orders. But looking back today, Trist did complete his task in a way that was of great benefit to the United States.

Students will be asked to create a resumé for Trist and to decide why an honorable man of his standing and experience would do what he did. Did he put his country first or last? What happened as a result of his actions? A review of the conflict between Texas and Mexico, including the Mexican War and its consequences, will be included using key battles, personalities, and the final treaty. Creative writing will be required on the last day of this series of lessons.

Procedures: Day One

1. Give students the document, *Texians to Arms*. Ask them to read the document and find a phrase from the letter to use as the title for a timeline of Texas/Mexican events that occurred after the letter was written. For example: "Mexicans will not respect the flag of the United States in Texas," or "5,000–20,000," or "honor."
2. There are many ways to construct timelines and it is suggested that teachers leave the creative format to the students. [Students may use the web program, "TimeLiner," to help them create their timelines online.] Ask them to include in their timeline any pictures they can find of battles and/or the actions of individuals.
3. At a minimum, students should include these events and the actions of these individuals in their timelines:
 - Battle of Palo Alto
 - Battle of Ressaque De La Palma
 - Battle of Monterrey
 - Battle of Vera Cruz
 - Battle of Cerro Gordo
 - Battle of Contreras
 - Battle of El Molino Del Ray
 - Battle of Chapultepec
 - President Polk
 - Zachary Taylor
 - Santa Anna
 - General Winfield Scott
 - General William Worth
 - John C. Fremont
 - John Slidell
 - Nicholas Trist
4. Students may confer while working with the laptops to share helpful websites.
5. Collect the timelines and post them in the classroom.
6. In a debriefing session, ask them to share what they discovered. Who seemed to be setting the stage for the events that occurred and what outcomes were expected—and unexpected?

Procedures: Day Two

1. Hand out the Nicholas Trist resumé template for students to complete. This will take some time and the websites listed above will help them work through the form. Again, use of laptops in the classroom (or a visit to the computer lab) is recommended. Students may collaborate to complete the task. They should treat this as a "real" resumé—typed, with no errors.

Procedures: Day Three

1. Distribute the document, *The Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo*, for students to review, along with the fact sheet on *President Polk's Directives*.
2. Have students read the Treaty and, using the fact sheet, evaluate the results based on Polk's requests.

- 3.** Discuss what students wrote in the “Thinking Box” as a class. How many different views did the student present? Ask if they can recall any other time an agent of the government did not follow the orders of the President. [For example: President Harry S Truman and General Douglas MacArthur.]
- 4.** Have the students refer to their fact sheets, the resumé for Trist, and the posted timelines (going up to look at them if needed) to choose one of the following activities to summarize the lessons of the last three days:
 - a.** Write an advice column to President Polk about the actions of Trist.
 - b.** Write a lengthy letter from Trist to his wife about his feelings as the President asks him to return to Washington.
 - c.** Create a page of Trist’s diary describing his talks with Santa Anna.
 - d.** Write an epitaph for a newspaper’s obituary column on how Trist’s life ended.
 - e.** Create a song or poem about Trist, Polk, and Santa Anna.
- 5.** Ask for volunteers to share their work. Collect their papers and make notations on whether they understood all that transpired during these events. ■